

# **SPECULATIONS. RISQUER L'INTERPRÉTATION**

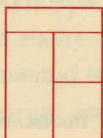
CURATOR: MÉLANIE RAINVILLE

RAYMONDE APRIL, SOPHIE BÉLAIR CLÉMENT,  
CAROLINE BOILEAU, TIM CLARK, SOREL COHEN,  
BRENDAN FERNANDES, LEISURE PROJECTS,  
PAUL LITHERLAND, KENT MONKMAN, ADRIAN NORVID,  
ROBER RACINE, LARRY RIVERS, PHILIP SURREY

PART 1: NOVEMBER 18 – 29, 2014

PART 2: DECEMBER 9, 2014 – JANUARY 10, 2015

PART 3: JANUARY 20 – 31, 2015



NOVEMBER 18, 2014 – JANUARY 31, 2015



Raymonde April, *Tout embrasser (Troll)* 39/517, 2001, inkjet print on paper. Collection of the Leonard & Bina Ellen Art Gallery, Concordia University. Gift of the artist, 2013

## WAYS OF THINKING

*Ways of Thinking* is designed for anyone interested in exploring contemporary art and its exhibition framework. It offers succinct and synthesized information on the exhibition's concept, the artists and the works featured. For the online version of *Ways of Thinking*, please visit our website: [www.ellengallery.concordia.ca/2006/en/](http://www.ellengallery.concordia.ca/2006/en/)

*Speculations. Risquer l'interprétation* brings together two projects which reflect on the process of interpreting works.

### INTERPRETING , REINTERPRETING WORKS FROM THE COLLECTION

The Gallery's A, D and E rooms present a *mise en abyme* of the interpretive act by way of three exhibitions and three interpretive approaches to a single body of artworks from the Gallery's collection. This part of the exhibition consists of an experiment that seeks to explore the effects of various formal and semantic associations, exhibition modes and spaces, and diverse educational approaches to the interpretation of the exhibited works. The three sections comprising this part make it possible to follow the interpretive work carried out by exhibition makers and the main issues involved in the process, i.e. the coherence and intelligibility of the works. The display foregrounds the recurrent concerns of many exhibition curators, which are rarely addressed directly: What are the effects of interpreting a work? At what point does interpretation become an over-interpretation or misinterpretation? Is it possible to avoid the instrumentalization of the work? This case study explores the shifting boundaries between the appropriate and the inappropriate in order to develop a balanced discourse between the artists' intentions and curatorial interventions.



### Interpreting, misinterpreting, over-interpreting, under-interpreting

The three sections that make up this project constitute more or less independent exhibitions. They reposition the same body of works throughout the rooms according to different criteria and intentions that, on the one hand, reveal the common threads uniting the works, and on the other, provide factual information which is essential to the interpretation of any work.

#### 1/ Appropriation – History – Past

The first section proposes an evaluation of the relationship between an artist or his/her work and various types of histories, *writ small* and personal or *writ large* and collective. The aim is to determine if certain interpretations of works or historical events – included by way of the appropriative practices embedded in the works – can become strategies allowing artists to inscribe themselves in the context of historical narratives. This spatial display contains documents evoking the production context of the works and providing information relating to the approach and intentions of the artists. This section employs an historicist approach to the works in order to consider specific modes in which the figure of the artist can be likened to an historian.

#### 2/ Discourse – Reading – Book – Text

The second section proposes an evaluation of the relationship between works and direct, or indirect discourses—either discourses by artists, exhibition curators or researchers in a professional, artistic or other field. It examines the interventions of reading, the book or the text in the field of the visual arts to determine if these can be said to represent a form of institutional influence. This presentation of the works is accompanied by documentation that refers to various prior dissemination contexts and reveals other interpretations of the works. In order to highlight the authorial status of artists, it examines the omnipresence of discourses that guide the interpretation of the works.

#### 3/ Alter ego – Autobiography – Drawing – Pop Art – Portfolio

The third section brings together the same works based on keywords, which serve to identify and describe them in the Gallery's collection database. This more random and less controlled methodology emphasizes other filial bonds existing between the works and broadens the interpretive possibilities. This space-time of the exhibition has no documentation and viewers are thus left free to explore single works or associations between works, so that they may think for themselves and discover the reflexive process involved in interpreting works. This is also an occasion for them to consider the memory traces left by the preceding sections—and by extension the effects of cultural overload—and to reflect on their renewed perception of the works in light of these new groupings.

#### Curatorial intentions

This exploratory project is driven by the desire to examine the coherence of a series of recent Gallery acquisitions following a selection and acquisition process in which I actively participated. This, *a priori*, personal examination of my own subjectivity, which echoes this selection of works, appeared to have attained universal importance when I reflected on the ways in which many institutions—starting with the Gallery—have proceeded to publicly present acquisitions in their exhibition history. The laudatory nature of such exhibitionary manifestations, which are rarely guided by a precise angle of inquiry, often limits them to a demonstration of a collection's riches, the acuity of a curator's judgement or the generosity of its

donors. These reflections led me to this project of renewing the presentation mode of an institution's recent acquisitions by eliminating *celebratory* tendencies, which have frequently characterized this type of intervention over the years.

In transforming this exhibition space into a database—as though the groupings of works resulted from keyword searches—I reveal my status as a curator within the Gallery team. The keywords associated with the works in the collection database, which had become a means of understanding them, forced me to take a distance from certain recurrent interpretations. However, this case study brings together works under different interpretive categories that are sometimes too encompassing to avoid their instrumentalization. Playing with the limits between the acceptable and the unacceptable, this scheme creates areas of doubt in which the exactness of the proposed interpretations must be evaluated.

*Speculations. Risquer l'interprétation* thus calls on the exhibition medium's pedagogical function, since it encourages intellectual effort by countering the notion that it is up to the presenting institution to provide meaning. Moreover, it evokes the research work carried out by the exhibition curator, who is confronted with a multitude of potential interpretations as well as the obligation to give shape to his or her choices and reflections in a space, in discourse and in time.

This examination of the interpretive work carried out by exhibition sites is part of a broader reflection on the accessibility and intelligibility of contemporary artworks and exhibitions. The presence of documentation in this space indicates that the works are equivocal evidence, characterized by the presence of ambiguity, since they do not systematically reveal their meanings. Consequently, visitors require support materials to understand certain artistic or curatorial intentions. These successive interpretations of the same works offer the possibility of assessing the quantity and nature of the required support material, and they present the Gallery's rooms as a dynamic interface between the visual arts and research, analysis and critical reflection, in accordance with a university gallery's mandate.

### INTERPRETING, REINTERPRETING THE REVERSE SIDE OF WORKS FROM THE COLLECTION

In the Gallery's B and C rooms is a new project by Paul Litherland, as well as an intervention by the curator that guides and diverts the project's interpretation. The mode of display evokes a discussion during which the artist stated that he had abandoned a project of photographing the reverse side of works, a process that led him to take an interest in their potential narratives, after having learned that Philippe Gronon and Vik Muniz had already explored this idea in their work. Litherland finally agreed to photograph the reverse side of works from the Gallery's collection, brought together in the series *B-Side*, to materially embody these questions about our relationship to the new and exclusive, the circulation and exhaustion of artworks and artistic approaches.

#### Doing it again, differently

*Speculations. Risquer l'interprétation*, in turn, echoes the Gallery's exhibition history, since most of the works from the collection it brings together have already been exhibited. It also has a certain spirit of kinship with the projects of other curators, such as *As much as possible given the time and space allotted* by Rebecca Duclos and David K. Ross, who reflected on the role of the curator

and the circulation of works in permanent collections, and *Adventures can be found anywhere, même dans la mélancolie*, of which it extends references to appropriation and from which it borrows furniture components.

### THE WORKS

- Raymonde April, *Tout embrasser (extraits)*, *Tout embrasser ( Rideaux)* 22/517\*, *Tout embrasser ( Régis)* 36/517\*, *Tout embrasser ( Régis)* 37/517\*, *Tout embrasser ( Oreillers)* 38/517\*, *Tout embrasser ( Troll)* 39/517\*, *Tout embrasser ( Arbre)* 40/517\*, 2001 ; Raymonde April, *Tout embrasser* (video), 2000
- Sophie Bélair Clément (in collaboration with David Jacques), *See you later / Au revoir : 17 minutes en temps réel*, 2008
- Caroline Boileau, *Ici et là, à travers, La fée du lit, Sous l'oreiller*, 2011; *Encore, les marcheuses*, 2011–2012; *L'époustouffée, L'insolente*, 2012; *L'éclaboussée*, 2013
- Tim Clark, *Deipnosophistae*, 1993
- Sorel Cohen, *Domestic Activity as Painterly Gesture*, 1977\*
- Brendan Fernandes, *Foe*, 2008
- Leisure Projects, *Folie à deux*, 2009
- Paul Litherland, *B-Side Dominique Blain – Ellen Art Gallery, B-Side Irene F. Whittome 1 – Ellen Art Gallery, B-Side Irene F. Whittome 2 – Ellen Art Gallery, B-Side James W. Morrice – Ellen Art Gallery, B-Side Michael Snow – Ellen Art Gallery, B-Side Denis Demers – Ellen Art Gallery, B-Side William Raphaël – Ellen Art Gallery, B-Side Lawren Harris – Ellen Art Gallery, B-Side Tom Gibson – Ellen Art Gallery, B-Side F. B. Taylor – Ellen Art Gallery, B-Side Serge Tousignant – Ellen Art Gallery, B-Side Agnes Lefort – Ellen Art Gallery*, 2014
- Kent Monkman, *Wolfe's Haircut & Montcalm's Haircut, My Treaty is with the Crown, The Academy*, 2011
- Adrian Norvid, *Get Stuffed*, 2009
- Rober Racine, *Pages-Miroirs : antifongique – fors, Pages-Miroirs : chimérique – reflet, Pages-Miroirs : douceur – gaîté, Pages-Miroirs : manade – collutoire, Pages-Miroirs : rebelle – îlien, Pages-Miroirs : sain – cantique*, 1989
- Larry Rivers, *Boston Massacre*, 1970\*
- Philip Surrey, *Decarie Boulevard*, vers 1959\*; *Hotel Russell*, n. d.; *Parking Lot*, 1965\*; *Spec's Grill*, 1945\*; *Westmount Carnival*, 1959\*

\* Except for the works by Paul Litherland and those accompanied by an asterisk (gift), all artworks are acquisitions by purchase. The Gallery acknowledges the generosity of the following donors: Raymonde April, Don Ernstein, Mira Godard, Jean and Frank Chubb, Galerie Martin, Rolla and Peter Freygood and the Samuel Lapitsky Foundation.



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